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Margrit

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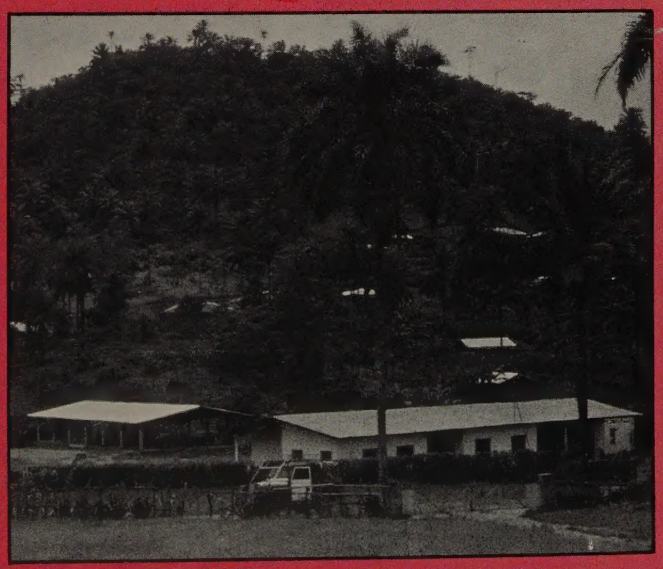

An African story

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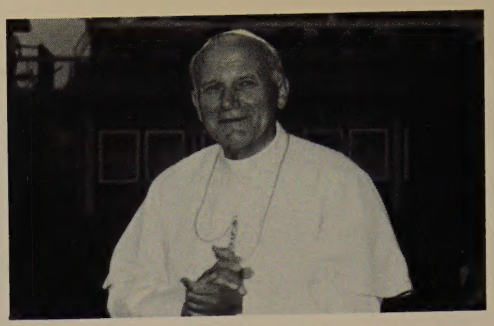

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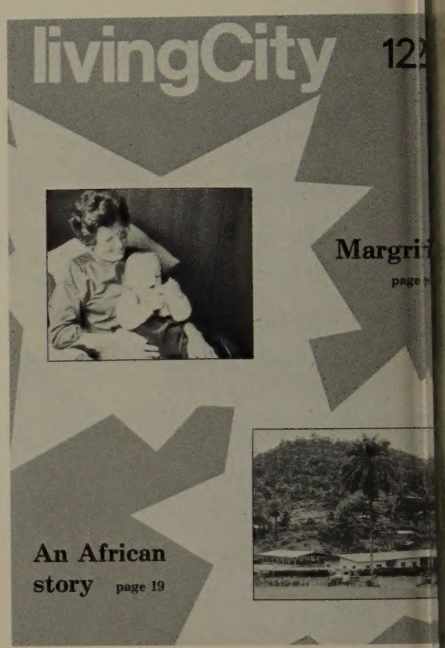

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An Irrevocable Decision

The following are excerpts from the address of Pope John Paul II to the College of Cardinals on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the institution of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

Today a particular motive leads me to speak to you about the reality, the progress, the problems concerning the union of Christians which we must seek according to the command of Christ: it is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the institution of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, desired by my predecessor John XXIII in the context of the preparation of the Second Vatican Council.

...It seemed just as significant to me that twenty-five years later we should together remember this event on the vigil of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. We remember in order to give thanks to God for the distance we have travelled, to reaffirm our determination to proceed along this path to the end, where the prayer of Christ incessantly calls us, and to infuse a new fervor into our movement towards the visible unity of all those who have died with him through baptism in order to be raised to new life in the Holy Spirit.

...The effort towards unity and ecumenical concern constitute a necessary dimension of the whole life of the Church. Everything can and must contribute to it. I have already asked on more than one occasion that the re-establishment of the unity of all Christians truly be considered a pastoral priority. We must work with our brethren of the other Churches and ecclesial communities in the ecumenical movement, that is, in the complex of "activities and initiatives that are stimulated and ordered to the promotion of Christian unity" (Unitatis Redintegratio, n. 4). *In this effort we must take every care to meet the legitimate desires and expectations of our Christian brethren, coming to know their way of thinking and their sensibilities. Collaboration must therefore be developed to a greater extent in order to arrive at a more efficacious service towards the cause of unity. The talents of each person must be developed for the unity and advantage of all.*

...Today's underlining of the theme of ecumenism takes on an even greater significance since, twenty years after the Council, we are approaching the Extraordinary Synod which has been called in order to infuse greater intensity into the realization

of the various conciliar decisions and to re-affirm the spirit which inspired them.

Can the attitude of ignoring the questions that still divide us, or acting as though they were resolved when they are not, truly be called progress?

...Unity in the profession of faith is the fundamental element of the manifestation of ecclesial communion: and this unity of faith is realized in every eucharistic celebration. Inasmuch as it is a "sacred action surpassing all others" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 7), *"the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed" and at the same time "the fount from which all her power flows"* (ibid., 10), *the eucharistic celebration, "in the full, active participation" of all the faithful, is "the principal manifestation of the Church"* (ibid., 41). *Therefore it cannot but presuppose the fundamental unity of the profession of faith, which constitutes the heart of ecclesial communion.*

If it were not thus, the very concept of the Church and of the Eucharist that we have received from both the Eastern and the Western traditions would be damaged.

...To testify to this truth and to its demands does not however mean to hold back the ecumenical movement. On the contrary, it means to avoid the accommodation of easy solutions which would not result in anything stable or solid.

...In fact, we must found our rediscovered unity on a joint process of deepening the "faith transmitted to believers once for all" (Jude 3); together we must discover all the aspects and all the requirements of truth; we must accept them and, together, submit to them.

...This truth is not abstract or academic. It is a question of salvific truth, a truth which has been gratuitously given to us so that we might make it a reality. A truth which is inseparably the way and the life (cf. Jn. 14:6).

...Another important characteristic of our common pursuit of the truth in order to arrive at unity is that it must be sought in love: Christian truth cannot be assimilated without charity. Only if we re-establish among us and continually deepen a real climate of fraternal charity can we progress together in truth.

...It must also be remembered that the journey towards unity, precisely because it is founded upon humility and love, requires of all—and especially on the part of public opinion—a sense of great patience. Some people perhaps have the impression that the initial thrust has come to a halt. After the celebration of the Council and the close interweaving of relations between the Catholic Church and the Christian Churches and ecclesial communities—with an unprecedented intensity and frequency—some thought that unity was achieved

As in the past, a delegation sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Demetrius I participated in the celebration in Rome of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The delegation was headed by the Metropolite of Myra, Chrysostomos Konstantinidis, (right), president of the world commission for relations with the Catholic Church. He was accompanied by Bishop Jeremias Sassima (center) and Archimandrite Spyridion Papageorgiou (left) Rector of the Greek Orthodox community of Rome.

►

while it is rather the fruit of continual steps forward. This movement proceeds, without a doubt. Patience does not mean inactivity or resignation. It takes into account the persevering effort which is continually made, even if at times in spem contra spem, *never becoming discouraged, proceeding ahead in the light of the Gospel teaching about the seed which grows and sprouts according to the rhythms willed by God.*

...Such patient and untiring perseverance is testified to by the theological dialogue which is going on with both the Churches of the East and the reformed communities of the West. In recent years it has even marked by unforgettable spiritual experiences. I recall the prophetic gestures of Paul VI: above all the abolition of the record of the excommunications between the Church of Rome and that of Constantinople on December 7, 1965 and ten years later, his kissing the feet of the Metropolitan Meliton, in witnessing to the service of unity which is the duty of the Successor of Peter.

At this point, the Holy Father recalled the various meetings held with the representatives of the Christian Churches of the East and the ecclesial communities of the West during his apostolic journeys over the years: the visit to the Phanar in Istanbul in November 1979, to Canterbury and Edinburgh, to Germany and other countries, the visit with the Lutheran bishops of the United States and members of the Reformed Church in Switzerland.

...All of this continuous interweaving of relationships which establishes mutual respect on the level of reciprocal knowledge, and which favors the approaches on the strictly theological level in their proper place and time.

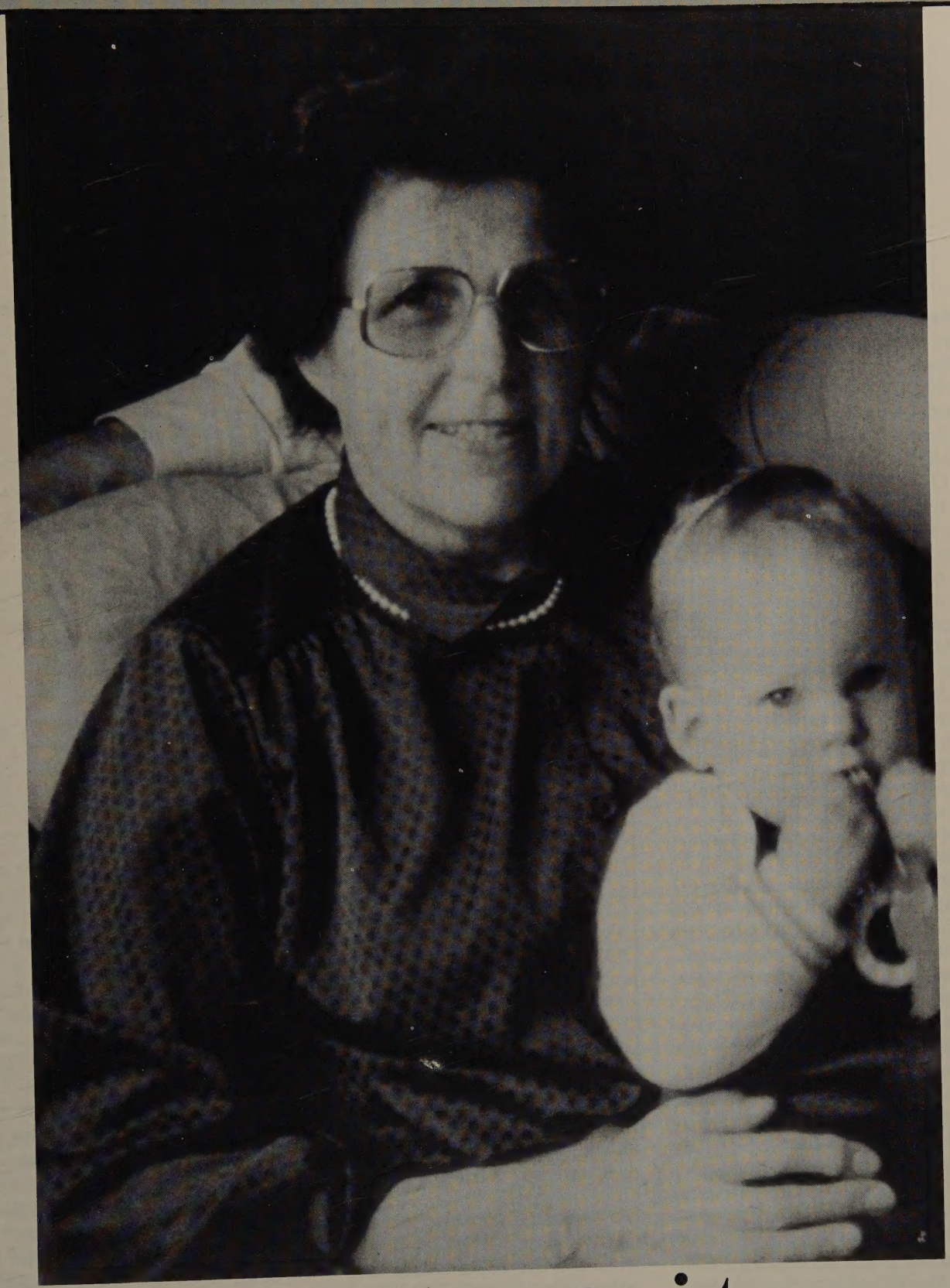
The Pope expressed his joy at knowing that the Patriarch of the Coptic Church has been able to resume his responsibilities once again. He recalled as well the common declaration signed a year ago with the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas; and finally his important visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. He announced that soon a joint study on religious freedom and its requirements would be undertaken.

In conclusion, the Holy Father again emphasized how strongly he feels about the ecumenical movement:

...I wish to re-affirm strongly that the Catholic Church is committed to the ecumenical movement with an irrevocable decision, and that she wants to contribute to it in every possible way. And for me, Bishop of Rome, that constitutes one of the pastoral priorities. It is an obligation which I must carry out in a particular way, precisely on account of the pastoral responsibility which is proper to me. This movement is brought about by the Holy Spirit and I hold myself deeply responsibile in its regard.

And I humbly ask the Holy Spirit for his light and his strength in order to serve the holy cause of unity in the best possible way. I ask you to implore it together with me; I ask you to implore it for me; to implore it for each one of you. Let us give thanks to God for what he has already brought about by means of the Secretariat for Christian Unity over the past twenty-five years; for what he has brought about in the other Churches and ecclesial communities and by means of them (cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, 3). □

Excerpts from *L'Osservatore Romano* English Edition, July 15, 1985.



margrit

Compiled by GABRI FALLACARA

Married and the mother of four, she was a clever businesswoman, an executive of the Hurlimann Autotechnik and Handel Company (a company dealing with automobile technology and trade) in St. Gall, Switzerland.

I met Margrit over ten years ago, almost by chance, not far from her home. She was always full of joy, very sensitive by nature and she possessed great simplicity. She seemed to have nothing else on her mind but to offer herself to others—like a mother, daughter, sister, or all of these things together.

This is how I remembered Margrit for a long time. I certainly never imagined that we would come to know her most outstanding characteristic this summer.

After presenting a few biographical notes about her I will let Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare Movement, describe the truly overwhelming significance of Margrit's message.

Margrit met the Gospel-centered spirituality of the Focolare in 1962, when she and Josef, her husband, attended the first Mariapolis[1] in German in Feldkirch, Austria. Soon after, her home became a center of life, offering hospitality to hundreds of persons interested in knowing the Movement.

In the meantime the family life of the Hurlimanns continued. Marie Therese the oldest daughter married. Josef, a director of the *Ama* project (the largest Third World aid program which was promoted by the internationally known Father Werenfried von Straaten and which provided three hundred trucks to the forty-four dioceses of the Amazon region) travelled to Brazil at least twenty times. Margrit helped with the correspondance and administration of the project until its successful completion in 1982.

September 1948. Margrit Hurlimann with her first child Marie Therese.

In 1973 one of her sons, Felix, felt he was called to consecrate his life totally to God. The Hurlimann family was well-accustomed to departures, but this one was very special—Felix was leaving to enter the "Focolare".[2] Margrit rejoiced in a particular way, and the following year she and her husband both became married focolarini.[3] "I can imagine how your heart must exult," Chiara wrote to her.

One sentence seemed to reflect her spiritual makeup in a special way; in fact it became her "word of life," the guideline of her daily life: "Who shall

Montet, September 1982. Margrit and Josef Hurlimann (at right) with Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, in the mini-city located in Switzerland. The Hurlimanns had moved there to take over the management of the farm.

find a valiant woman?" It kept her always ready and eager to accept new challenges.

The moment came in 1980 when a permanent Mariapolis, a mini-city based on the life of the Gospel, was started in Montet, Switzerland. Both Margrit and Josef together felt that God was calling them there. Renouncing their plans for a comfortable retirement, they settled all the financial matters of their company in order to be free to help in any way needed.

In 1981, the *Permanent Mariapolis Foco*, as it was called, was inaugurated and the Hurlimann's took on the responsibility of managing the Montet farm with its complicated operation. In September of 1982, they moved definitively to Montet, leaving their home forever. It seemed to them the most natural thing to do.

Two years ago the unexpected happened. Margrit was stricken with a serious, incurable illness. However, she took the news peacefully. "Everything is God's love," she said, "I am not afraid. He sent me this illness so that I could offer my suffering for the world. I am ready for whatever he may ask of me."

Hospital treatments, remissions and relapses—all were lived through without complaint, with the will to get well and with concern that others not worry or suffer because of her. She continued to hope, to talk about life, about its beauty, about the joy of living.

From June to December 1984, her condition rapidly deteriorated. Reduced to the utter limit of her physical and spiritual forces, her suffering became excruciating, with only brief intervals of respite. "If I think of Jesus enduring the flagellation and the crowning of thorns, my pain is more bearable." The way of the cross led Margrit to the point where she felt abandoned by the Father and cried out, "Why?"

She was able, however, to overcome this terribly difficult period because she continued to love always. Hundreds of letters have testified to the deep impression she made on so many people because of this very fact. In early 1985, when she finally returned home from the hospital, she felt a new sense of freedom. "Here, in my little office, I feel as though I am in a tabernacle. I am in want of nothing. God's presence is always with me." ►

She wrote Felix in Chicago. "Yes, I am convinced, too, that all of this is a part of a marvelous plan of God. This illness has been the opportunity of my life." In June, a month before leaving for a period of vacation, she meticulously put all her things in in order, as though by intuition she knew she would never return.

> *"One sentence seemed to reflect her spiritual makeup in a special way, in fact it became her 'word of life', the guideline of her daily life: 'Who can find a valiant woman'?"*

As her time became shorter, she often repeated the decision she had made at Easter: "I want to live every moment as though it were the last." And, as her condition worsened, she joked: "I am only a worm, but I fight like a lion!"

The following is how Chiara Lubich spoke of Margrit in an interview with Vatican Radio on August 15.

"Margrit will always be for me the person who reconciled me with death. Death is always a serious matter; it is feared and it is mysterious. We can talk at length about this dark passage; we can prepare ourselves for it throughout our lifetime, but there will always be moments when we shrink from the thought of it. Death, in fact, seems to be out of harmony with the life we live, and that is because it is a harsh, inescapable consequence of sin.

"With her death, however, Margrit left me this precious gift: a conviction that caused me to say, from the depth of my heart, 'If this is what death is like, it is welcome! It is truly wonderful to die.' She fully reconciled me with death.

"I kept close to Margrit last year when her soul underwent such difficult spiritual trials that they reminded one of the 'dark night' of the saints. Those who witnessed her suffering, and who knew nothing about the mystery of Jesus crying out on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'[4] might have said, 'but this is too much.'

"I went to see her for the last time a few days before she died. She was in bed, reduced to skin and bones. Her big, beautiful, shining eyes opened and closed in that half-sleep that was a prelude to death. I asked her, 'Are you happy, Margrit?' She answered: 'I am happy, happy, happy.' Then, closing and reopening her eyes, she added, 'I have no problems. I am very, very happy.'

"Seeing her like that, and knowing how much she had been purified by suffering, I said, 'Just think, Margrit, you will go to heaven and there will be great rejoicing'. Again, she replied: 'It is incredible' as if to say, 'it is too beautiful.' And then, looking at me with a radiant smile, she said: 'I am like Jesus.' 'Like Jesus crucified and forsaken,' I said, as she was close to death as he had been. 'Yes, but very happy,' she concluded.

"In that moment I realized that I was witnessing with my own eyes an extraordinary phenomenon: an explosion of life with the presence of the Risen Lord in a body reduced to nothing, the grace of God bursting forth in all its power. While, in fact, the human life of Margrit was diminishing like the final flicker of a candle flame, another stronger flame, another Life, I would say, was growing in her, a life that was powerful, luminous, and full of love: Eternal Life.

"Yes, I can say that I have contemplated the existence of eternal life. It was something which absolutely could not be explained in human terms. I repeated to myself: 'This must be the way saints die.' I wish it could happen that I, that all of us, could die in this way. A death of this kind is stupendous. We will, however, be reconciled with death tomorrow if we know how to be reconciled with life today, with its problems, its sufferings, its demands." □

1) The Mariapolis are the summer gatherings of the Focolare Movement. 2, 3) See inside back cover. 4) Mt. 27:46.

A change in mentality

Economy and work

The $40.00 mistake

I arrived in Chicago three years ago, at the height of the unemployment crisis. All the doors seemed to be closed to anyone searching for a job. For that reason, I decided to start working part-time, on a temporary basis, until I could find a permanent position. Finally, with the help of an agency, I came across the "best" offer that I had had in six months. It came with the agency's strong recommendation that I take it as they would not be able to find me anything else for some time.

The job was that of a bookkeeper in a small family business. At first the idea of a small family business really turned me off. I had always worked in big companies where you don't have direct contact with the owners and therefore there is a certain freedom.

I took the job reluctantly, telling myself that I would take it for two weeks and then decide if it were the place for me. The end of the two weeks came; I hadn't found anything else and they paid me well. I decided to stay, hoping that when the economic situation changed (perhaps in six months) I could find something better.

During the short time I was there, I learned that it was a business facing serious problems. The husband of the lady who was acting as "boss" was dying of cancer. The two of them had built up the business from scratch; it was now very sound. However, the person in charge was terminally ill and hospitalized.

Furthermore, her son, who was to take over his father's part of the business, was going through a divorce and had a lot of personal problems. Therefore, she was under tremendous pressure. She compensated for all this by her strong efforts to keep things going at any cost. It was this desperate state that led her to hire help from outside the family.

Perhaps because of this woman's personal problems, working for her was certainly not easy. At times when I would be talking to a customer, she would interrupt to say, "You're not aggressive enough." At times she would take the phone from me and do it herself. These actions on her part seemed to confirm to me that this was definitely not the job for me.

One day, however, I was struck with the realization that this was the job that God had given me in the present moment. I could die before six months passed and I could look for another one. I made a firm decision to give it a try. With this change of attitude, I began to interest myself in their problems. At times I was tempted to think: "I've come here to make a salary .... why should I bother myself about their problems.... I'm not a social worker." But now I was convinced—God had a plan for me in this job; I started to seek small ways to love my boss concretely. When she screamed on the phone at the customers, selecting my words carefully, free of any hint of judgment, I would calm her down. In other moments, she would try to pressure me to eat my lunch in ten minutes, so as to "waste as little time as possible." (She stressed the fact that keeping a fast pace increased their capital). My first reaction was, "I don't have any profit sharing, so why should I put up with this?" Then, I reminded myself, to love at any cost meant also this. Her son was frequently absent, leaving her alone to clean up at the end of the day. This was my chance to be at her side, sharing with her some of the burdens.

This effort not to stop loving went on for a year and a half until I was certain that my relationship with my boss was a very solid one. Then one morning something happened that caused me to doubt this.

Every day I dealt with $20,000 to $30,000 in cash, recording it before depositing it in the bank. When I counted the deposit that day, I found $40.00 missing from one of the $1,000 packages. Noting this discrepancy, ►

I went immediately to my boss to report the missing $40.00. She reacted strongly: "I counted it last night and it was right. We have to see what's happening here ... I don't think that this is the first mistake."

It's indescribable what I went through that day; I felt accused of being a thief. I knew that the suffering I was experiencing was an aspect of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken, but the hurt remained. It seemed to me that the relationship we had built had crumbled; she was now doubting my integrity for $40.00. However, in the midst of this pain, I knew that my confrontation with my boss over this incident had to be one of love. As much as I felt like it, I couldn't just get upset and walk out.

That day the store was very busy and my boss had to be with customers constantly. I knew it was not a good idea to speak with her that afternoon. I was determined to quit, not out of anger, but rather due to the concern that if they suspected me of stealing $40.00, which I could replace, what would happen if $20,000 were missing, which I could not replace. I would go to jail! Not wanting to interrupt my boss at work, I waited to call her from home that evening. I prepared myself to be as calm and as loving as possible. I told her that I could not work in that position without her full trust and confidence. Surprisingly, she didn't seem to understand what I was talking about. "What are you saying," she responded, "that I called you a thief?"

Apologizing, she began to cry: "You are the only person that I can trust, that I can share my problems with. Please don't leave just because of this." I realized then that her pride wouldn't allow her to admit that she had miscounted the money. She had been doing it for the past 25 years and had never made a mistake.

The following day she apologized again, asking if she could prepare for me a meal of "my choice." She felt that she had to make up in some way for the suffering that she had caused me. I began to see a real change in her behavior towards me and the other employees and customers. Frequently we spoke about her own sufferings and the problems that her son was experiencing. A number of days later, one of the sales girls remembered that they had given change from the deposit after the owner had counted it; the missing $40.00 was explained.

Two weeks later, when my next paycheck arrived, I had a raise of $1,200 a year. Her son followed this up with a phone call to say that I would be in the profit sharing and in four years, if I were to leave, I could collect my portion—just like any member of the family.

J.D. - U.S.A.

Almost fired

After his wife's miscarriage Carl became depressed. His health suffered, too, and he was granted a month's leave of absence, but he didn't show up at his job the day he was due back. I found out about this from some people from his work area as they shrugged their shoulders in regret. However, it wasn't their problem.

Carl and I didn't work together, and there was nothing I could do to help either, yet something stopped me from dismissing it entirely. A thought I knew so well came to mind urging me to involve myself in Carl's problem: "In so far as you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40)

I tried phoning Carl but there was no answer. I got permission to leave the plant and with another worker I drove to Carl's house. His wife opened the door; Carl was still in bed. Kindly but firmly we talked him into following us back to the plant. Without a word he got up, got dressed and came. He was a sorry sight: without energy or purpose.

His supervisor okayed Carl's return to work and everything was back to normal. Two days later, though, Carl was supposed to show up for the afternoon shift and didn't. In an effort to help Carl, his supervisor tried phoning him but since no one answered, he had no choice but to report Carl absent "without good reason." This absence would cost him his job.

I was asked to carry the memo regarding his dismissal to the personnel office and to

United Nations

my great surprise and joy I discovered that the secretary had left early. This turn of events gave me a little more time to convince Carl to come back to work.

That evening I called Carl and explained the situation. He listened in silence and then began to talk about how much and how joyfully they had been awaiting the birth of their baby. Now he couldn't accept the loss. I told him that I, too, had found myself in similar circumstances with our first child and, for what it was worth, I could understand how he felt. They could still have other children ... he had to pick himself up and be strong. The future of his family was at stake; he couldn't lose this job.

He was convinced. He hung up after promising that the next day—at the proper time—he would show up at work. I breathed a sigh of relief even if I still had to work on the supervisor. Gathering all my courage I telephoned his supervisor the next morning to explain what had happened and to tell him about my conversation with Carl. I certainly didn't expect him to thank me, but he did. It turned out that after he had written the memo he hadn't been able to sleep all night because he regretted having fired Carl.

Carl hasn't been absent from work anymore. This incident was important for me because it made me realize how much we need each other—even at work where everything can so easily become impersonal and everyone anonymous.

G.N. - Italy ►

Medicine

The price of a career

United Nations

I come from Brazil and all my life my greatest dream had been to become a doctor. I chose to specialize in surgery. Often people ask me if it has been hard, as a woman, to gain respect and acceptance in what in my country is still considered to be an all-male field. My experience is that it has been tough, but what has helped me more than anything has been the determination to live the Gospel in my field of work.

In my city I was the first woman to ask the Chief of Staff of a major hospital to become a member of his team of residents. He tried to dissuade me saying, "A doctor must be strong, determined, possess good judgment, a capacity for logical reasoning, and emotional control, but you—you are a woman...."

I insisted so strongly, however, that he finally agreed to let me try. I had one foot in the door, but the first difficulties were soon to come. I studied for hours and hours without counting the sacrifices; I took advantage of every moment, even weekends, to stay with the patients at the hospital. The fact that I tried to do each task as best I could as if God had entrusted it to me, made even the difficulties meaningful.

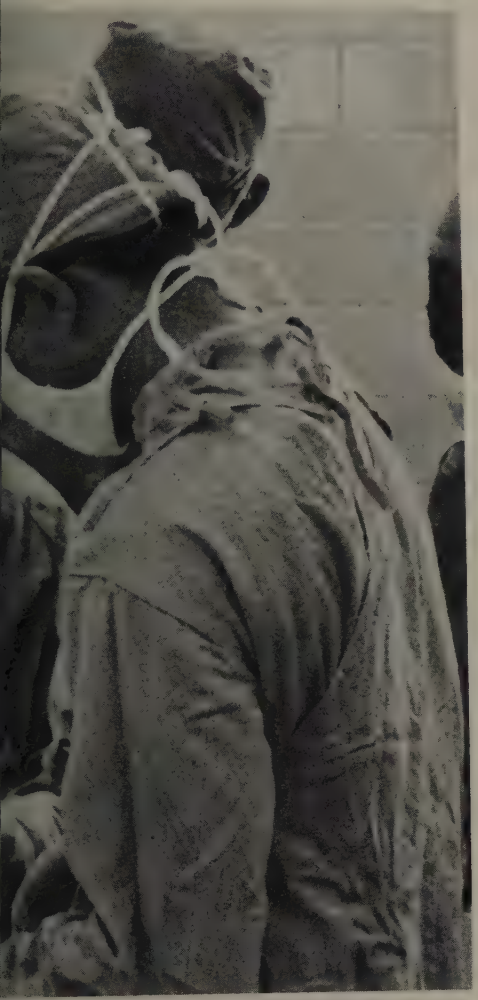
From the beginning, however, I felt looked down upon by my eight male colleagues and particularly by the Chief of Staff. This left me perplexed because in the contacts I'd had with other medical teams I was treated with respect and consideration. One day I expressed my concern to the chief. He responded that he didn't know what I was talking about, that I was imagining things. I tried to convince myself this particular treatment I was receiving was all part of a calculated "trial by fire" to test my resistance and emotional control. Nevertheless, they obviously excluded me on many occasions.

Since the Chief of Staff was always accustomed to dominating others, he felt he had the right to order me around and be demanding. Seeing that I was determined to stick with the job, the other colleagues also tried testing me to see if they could succeed in breaking my determination down.

I remained firm in my resolve to "hang in" no matter what. At times, however, I did get so upset that I doubted if I would make it to the end. In these moments I was sustained by my commitment to try to live the Gospel at any cost. I also felt supported by friends who shared my same Christian ideal. Many times I remembered Jesus' words, "It is I. Do not be afraid"(Mt.14:27), and this too gave me the strength to forgive my colleagues after each incident and it freed me of feelings of resentment. I tried to continue to love my colleagues and the Chief of Staff in many small and concrete ways.

After some time, I felt that they began to respond. To my surprise, the professor started to call me to assist him in important surgical procedures so that I could better follow his work. My colleagues also gradually began to include me. They appreciated the quality of my work and began to give me the chance to participate more: they allowed me to finish some operations and, later on, they guided me in the total execution of others.

This gave me the confidence essential to my technical improvement. In fact, it was the only possible way for me to learn the numerous details involved in surgery.



"My appeal sensitized one of the most competent members of the team, and he decided to operate."

In the meantime, however, the difficulties had not ended. When they discovered that I attended daily Mass my colleagues started another kind of "persecution," telling rude jokes in front of me and pinning me with rather unpleasant nicknames.

I still didn't give up. Rather this was a chance for me to show them that the freedom I possessed was within me and that I acted according to my convictions. So I continued to behave as usual, not hiding the fact that God had a very important place in my life.

The Chief Surgeon became rather an expert in this persecution and delighted in needling me. One day, however, he became seriously ill. The phrase of the Gospel that came most strongly to my mind when I heard about his illness was, "Love your enemies." I decided to go and visit him at home. His condition was not good and he really was suffering. I thought that the best thing I could do in those circumstances was to ask God to help him and so, without being deterred by what he might think of me, I assured him, "I'll pray for you."

After a long absence he returned to work, completely recovered. As soon as he saw me he came over and said, in a very serious and grateful way, "It seems that your prayers worked and that your God listens to you." Since that day he has never made even one derogatory remark and has cut short the others if they start.

The climate at work became more serene until something else happened which made my colleagues begin to gossip. Robert, one of the team, was married, but things were not going well. He would go for days without showing up at home and openly hinted at wanting a separation. I tried to discourage the talk that was going on by simply ignoring the others' remarks.

One day, however, during a break, Robert was alone in the office. I knew that the choice I had made as a Christian wasn't only for me but for everyone and that I had to at least try to help him to work things out and save the family. We talked at length, and more than once. At the end of one conversation, he thanked me for my concern, saying that he would really give it a try. A few days later he brought his wife and child to the office to introduce them to me. "We've really started again," he whispered to me as they left; but the smile on his face had already assured me of that.

During our break time I tried to steer the conversations to current topics and events dealing with the field of medicine so that we could all make better use of our time together. In one of these "sessions" I brought up the case of a twenty-three year old man who had been hospitalized after being stabbed in prison. He was in prison serving a sentence for murder and had been injured in a fight he had provoked.

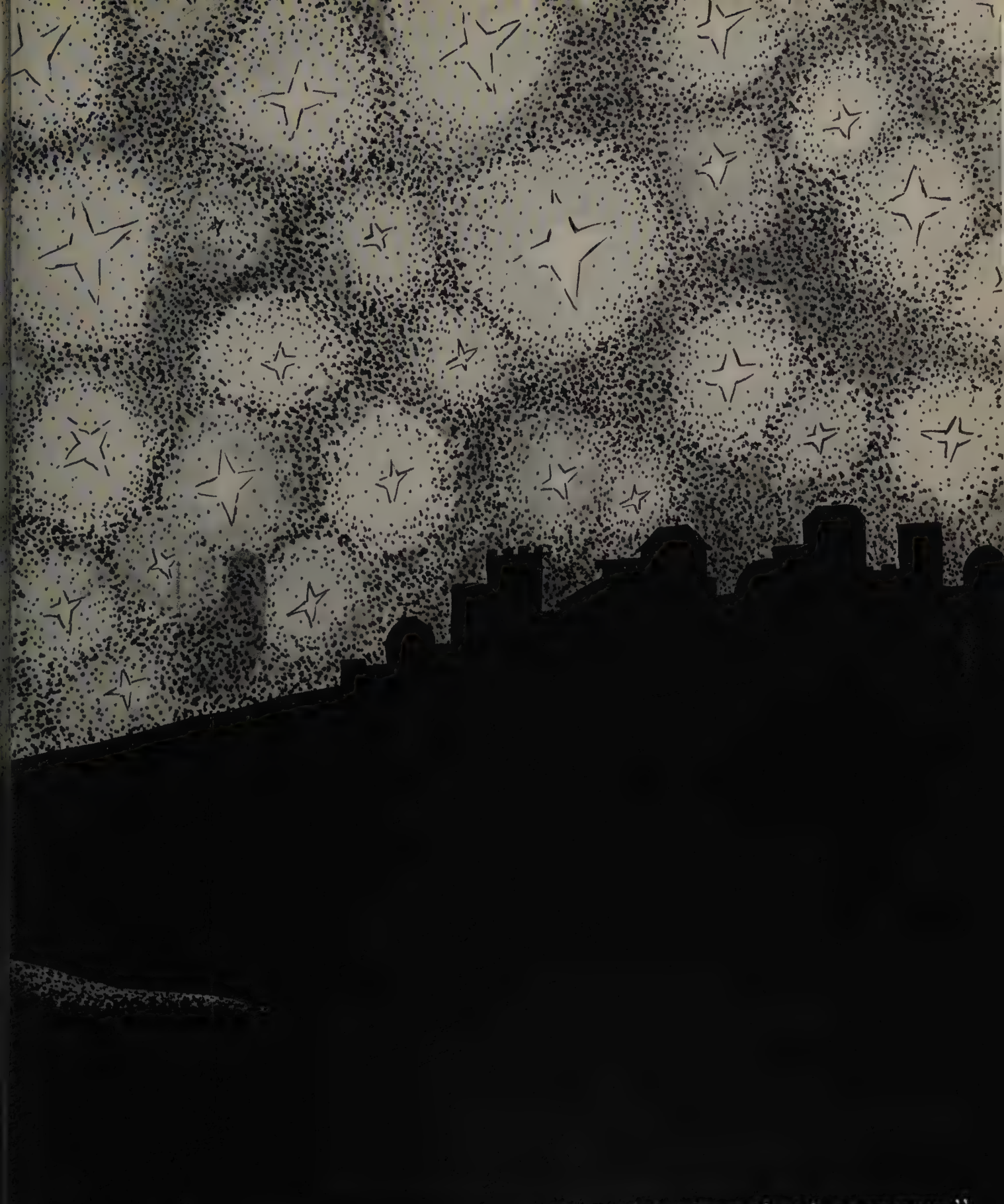
In order to save his life surgery was needed, a very serious and delicate operation, but no one wanted to do it. All the surgeons discreetly refused for one reason or another saying that they had other patients who required more urgent care.

I couldn't understand this attitude and I questioned one of my colleagues. Their point was that it was useless to operate on this person because as soon as he got out of prison, or maybe while he was still in prison, he would probably be killed for the murder he had committed. They gave little value to his life.

I started to work on them, trying to convince them to act more humanly. I argued that by not operating they were cer-

(Continued on page 28)

Christmas '85



"Jesus is born among us if we love one another with a love that is ever new."

CHIARA LUBICH

"You did not choose me..."

Compiled by ORESTE PALIOTTI

At eighteen I had all the crises and posed all the questions characteristic of my age. What was life all about anyway?

I come from an ordinary family. We had our problems and our joys, and just enough money to live on. We were united enough to give me the idea of what it meant to love, and full enough of defects to prevent me from idealizing relationships with others.
I remember very little of my childhood with the exception of one incident which was very important for me.

When we were very small, my brother and I used to go to the park with our dad. We always looked forward to feeding the pigeons with the popcorn my father bought. One day, while in the park, a friend of my father's came along with his children. Dad asked us to generously offer them our bag of popcorn which we did rather unhappily. I had hoped that they would share it with us so that we could enjoy feeding the birds together, but they didn't. With childish selfishness they refused to give us anything.

It was a great diappointment. As soon as we were alone Dad said, "Don't be upset; the important thing is that you did your part." I must have been five years old, but that experience, and the truth in my father's words, were unforgettable. I don't know whether it's possible to date my "vocation" from then, possibly not, considering that a vocation does not spring up like a mushroom, but is formed through a thousand circum-

"Who knows how many important things there are to discover," I said to myself. "You could miss a lot while you're just walking up and down Victoria Lane."

stances and blossoms slowly almost as if it had to pass through a period of gestation.

At eighteen, during my last year of high school, I had all the crises, and posed all the questions characteristic of my age. My mind was cluttered with many things. I had become distant from my family; especially following an argument over a girl who, in reality, I wasn't even serious about. Nobody understood me ... I wanted to help mankind "understand." For this reason I thought of studying medicine. (I saw this lack of understanding as a real illness.) However these were long and tiring studies; furthermore I would have had to move to a town distant from my own.

I was uncertain about everything. From observing the adult world I became convinced that with a bit of sacrifice and application, one could reach any goal. But was there a goal worthy of so much labor? I put off answering this question until junior high school, then until high school, and then I found myself at the threshold of college. Always, when I seemed to have achieved something, that magic moment, in which one experiences a sense of accomplishment, disappeared; enthusiasm was replaced by disappointment and pessimism. What was life all about anyway?

In the midst of this confusion, there were moments of light. For example, when I was in high school I took part in an essay contest, writing on the topic: "How can the man of the year 2000 have a relationship with God?" Knowing that my moments of deepest intuition (when I understood that there must be something more to life) were those in which I suffered, I wrote that the best way to find this relationship was through pain. I submitted the paper without really understanding the depth of what I had written. When I won a prize for the best essay, I realized that my ideas were not quite as foolish as I had thought.

I had an almost "ingrained" certainty that God existed. Sometimes I spoke about him with friends, and sometimes I even turned to him. But in the end he was still a stranger, like ►

a work of art to be admired from time to time.

On Sunday it was a ritual, especially for us young people, to meet together and strut up and down the footbridge of Victoria Lane. However, I knew other young people who didn't come to this almost compulsory meeting place simply because they had other things to do. They were helping the elderly and sick. Although they were not part of the group I got along with them very well. They helped me to wake up from my lethargy and to discover a part of humanity I had never thought about before. "Who knows how many more important things there are to discover," I said to myself. "You could miss a lot while you're just walking up and down Victoria Lane." This thought made me uncomfortable. Yet I knew I shouldn't lose contact with those people. There were moments with them when I experienced an unusual joy, as if I had discovered something that made life worth living.

In June of 1966 I met the Focolare. Faced with the sincerity of their Christian life, my selfishness and lack of concern for others lessened. Without realizing it, I absorbed from the people of the Movement the life of the Gospel. This changed my way of reasoning and behaving.

One of my new friends posed this question: "Do you know that God has a plan for you, for your life?" It hit me like lightning. It seemed incredible —God was thinking of me and loved me! It was such an enormous thought that it changed my life. A few days later I had some make-up exams to take. I went in very calmly, concerned only with the thought that God loved me.

I made my choice in that moment. When I spoke about it to others, however, I was misunderstood. My peace was mistaken by others for stupefaction. "Don't listen to them," people told me. "Don't you realize that it's madness ... wake up!" In good faith everyone tried to "bring me back to reality," but I never before had my feet planted so firmly on the ground. In fact I was surprised, because it seemed to me as if they were the ones who didn't understand.

I had always felt uncomfortable in anything that was structured. I preferred spontaneous, unorganized things. Yet now I found myself happy to be with these people, doing organized things. Even more amazing to me was this new discovery of the Gospel which opened up to me a mysterious but even more distinct call to follow Jesus, a call which I later answered by leaving my home, family and friends.

Making such a decision was a big thing, especially for a Sicilian like myself. I was attached to certain things, like a book I had bought with my meager savings, or a special stone that I had picked up on the beach; so imagine how I was attached to greater things! I felt like someone who had been acting a part in a play depicting the story of someone's life, when suddenly, it is announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, the script has been changed ...we are not sure what will follow, but it will certainly be more interesting than what came before!"

The moment arrived when a small van with worn-out brakes lost control near a wall where I was standing. I was knocked to the ground and my foot was run over. The driver got out and ran away but someone came to my rescue. As they were preparing to take me to the hospital, I asked them to notify my parents who lived nearby.

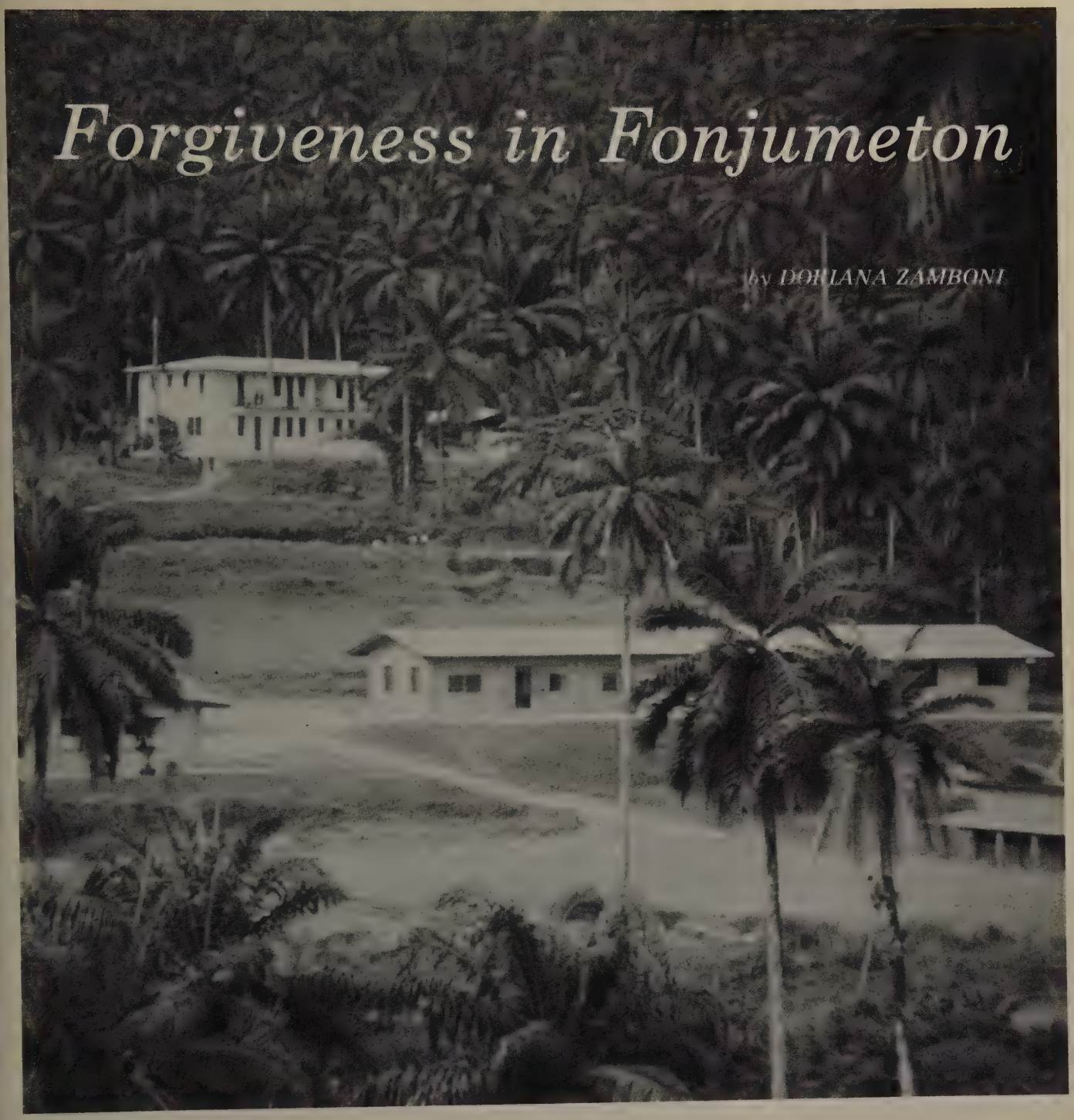
When they heard about the accident, my parents were so shocked that the drama of my departure, scheduled to take place a few days later, became of secondary importance. They would have forgiven me anything. And I sort of took advantage of this.

"You're brave," a friend in whom I confided my plans told me. He was right. To follow God meant taking a leap in the dark. But why me, I thought, and not someone else like my friend who was so much better than I. Later I found the answer in a sentence of Scriptures which, since I hadn't read it much before, was unfamiliar to me. It said: "You did not choose me but I chose you...." It was his decision. It was his business. My part (and my good fortune) was to be part of *his* plan.

Now, after experiencing this "fullness of life" and so many moments of a joy that I would never have imagined, I feel a healthy fear: what would have happened if I had not stepped into his plan? □

Forgiveness in Fonjumeton

by DORIANA ZAMBONI



Reconciliation in the lives of a young African couple brought about effects in the entire community.

I recently received a letter from Cecile, a nurse in the Cameroons. In it she related an episode that would never happen in the Western world; however it is an experience which proves how serious and seemingly insolvable problems can be resolved.

In 1976, a group of missionaries settled in the village of Fonjumeton in the Cameroons, in the midst of a population which was almost entirely animist. The people followed the beliefs and ancestral traditions of their tribe. In 1978, however, some of the inhabitants got together to build a church, as many had requested religious instruction in Christianity and wanted to have a place where they could pray together.

Daniel, who had been baptized while still in school, ►

offered to teach catechism. On that occasion, he also asked to receive the sacrament of marriage for himself and his wife Maria. They already had two children. They were both already Christian, but the Gospel was slow to penetrate this animist environment where tradition was more deeply rooted than religion.

Daniel was poor, but since he loved Maria, he had managed to obtain her as his bride by paying only part of the dowry normally requested by the father of the bride. He had promised to pay up the whole amount a little at a time. In addition to his work, the new catechist taught and followed the progress of his pupils personally; the budding community loved him. Many took part in the religious instruction classes, both children and adults.

At a certain point, however, something happened. Daniel began to complain of not feeling well, and started to behave strangely. To the disbelief and consternation of the congregation, he began to change the meaning of the sermons he was giving to the people for the missionary priest. He was nervous and restless, and started fights with everybody. He went so far as to threaten his wife who fled to her family, leaving the two little girls behind. People began to be afraid of him and spread the word that he was possessed by an evil spirit. In the fear of being contaminated, nobody dared go near him.

He was now alone with the children. In the village

Daniel (second from left), one of the principle characters of this experience, at work with others on the new church in Fonjumeton.

everyone was consulting witch doctors and trying all kinds of exorcisms.

One day Cecile happened to pass by the village. Having learned about Daniel, she went to see him. She found a dark, empty house with no fire and no food. Daniel was half asleep, with the two weak and malnourished little girls crouching beside him. Cecile thought immediately of sleeping sickness, which was very widespread in the area.

It took a great deal to convince the people that Daniel's condition had nothing to do with evil spirits but was due to brain damage usually associated with this illness. She managed to get him to the hospital, where her diagnosis was proven correct. The illness was already in a very advanced stage, and they immediately started treatment which gave good results.

In the meantime news got around that after Maria had returned to her father, she was given in marriage to another man and was already expecting his child.

Even though he had not been baptized, Maria's father knew that Christian marriage was indissoluble. However, he felt his actions were justified by the fact that Daniel hadn't fully paid the dowry he owed for Maria, and was possessed by an evil spirit and therefore ostracized by all. He had also tried to obtain a divorce in Civil Court, but Daniel, sick as he was, refused to cooperate.

Months went by and Maria was about to give birth. For the delivery she went to the hospital in Fontem where Cecile worked. This was her opportunity to explain to Maria that her husband's behavior was entirely due to his illness, and that he was getting much better. She even arranged for the two to meet and talk things over.

Daniel, though still weak from the strenuous treatment, had recovered his mental faculties. He tried to convince his wife of the importance of being married in Church and explained to her that before God, they were inseparable. He proposed to keep the new baby as though it were his own and asked her to come back and live with him.

It all seemed like a dream to Maria. She was afraid, however, of her new husband who had already paid her father in full, and also of her father, who had pushed her into this second marriage.

Meanwhile, his health much improved, Daniel reassumed his responsibilities as a catechist. He felt strongly that what mattered most was to have faith in God and that he and his wife, who were the first to be baptized in the village, had to give an example of faith to all.

In the meantime Maria gave birth to a fine, healthly baby boy. She asked for hospitality at the mission so that she wouldn't have to go back either to Daniel's house, or to her father, or to her new husband. Her request was granted.

The following morning, a Sunday, the Church was packed with Christians and others who had come to pray. As the missionary priest announced the news of Maria's return all responded with applause and cries of joy. After Mass they all went singing and dancing, to welcome Maria in her little room at the Mission. They promised they would take turns caring for her.

After two days, Maria went to the mission fathers and told them she felt she had to do what Jesus had done: forgive. She decided to put aside all that had happened and go with the baby to live in Daniel's house, as he had proposed.

One month later, Daniel returned to his village, fully recovered. The two little girls, who had been left with neighbors, joined them in their old home, and the family was happily reunited.

In Africa there is a very strong sense of solidarity among the people, and the Gospel has strengthened this even more. Thus, the Christians of Fonjumeton share one another's problems. Since Daniel was still too weak to work the fields by himself, the people of the village took turns growing the coffee which had been neglected for some time. They also got together to see how to return the money Maria's second husband had given to her father, and how to help Daniel pay up his part. The father, too, began to move toward a reconciliation with Daniel.

The entire community of the village, Christians and non-Christians alike, all who were involved in this episode, gained new courage from it: the courage to remain faithful to one's commitment. This experience also served to strenthen even more the ties of brotherhood that held them together. □

WORD OF LIFE

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

(1 Thes. 3:12)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

In order to grasp all the riches contained in these words we must place ourselves in the context and frame of mind in which they originated. The apostle Paul learned that persecution had been stirred up against the community of Thessalonica. It was a community fresh and full of energy and enthusaism, but newly born and for that reason in need of support.

The Apostle rightly feared that life in the young community might be snuffed out by the storm. He would have gone there himself but serious obstacles prevented him. Paul, then turned in prayer to the Lord asking that circumstances be directed in a way that would permit him to again visit the community and, until then, that the Lord help the community grow in mutual love.

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

From these apparently very simple words the idea shines through, first of all, that all of Christian life is summarized in mutual love. At the same time we discover that mutual love is the efficacious means to sustain, strengthen and invigorate the soul in the face of persecution and all the external and internal difficulties that threaten it.

The reason for this is not hard to understand. Mutual love sets into motion and potentiates all the supernatural energies that have been placed in us by the Holy Spirit on the day of our baptism: faith which urges us to always recognize Jesus in our neighbor, hope which helps us to begin anew after every failure, and all the aspects of love of neighbor (humility, meekness, patience, mercy, purity, spiritual poverty and so on). Mutual love, above all, makes us grow in the love of Jesus' cross since it continually demands that we deny ourselves in order to be united to our neighbor.

Naturally, all of this assures us of an always keener light, a strength and union always more intimate with the Risen Jesus present among us.

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

The second thought evoked by this sentence is that the existence of mutual love in a given situation is not a presupposed fact to be taken for granted. Mutual love must grow in us always more; it is a reality we are called to build day by day.

We know that our selfishness seeps in everywhere, leading us to choose always what is more

EXPERIENCES

comfortable, but we are not called to love with the measure of our mediocrity. We must love with Jesus' measure which means to love without measure, to love without placing limits to it.

Now, the Apostle says, this love must not only grow but even overflow, that is, become always more capable of overcoming all the understandable modes of resistance that we carry within us.

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

The third fact that comes to light here is the Lord's particular guidance to which we must respond in order to help us to grow in mutual love.

The Lord has called us to Christian life. Since he loves us immensely we can be certain that he will go to any lengths so that this life will grow and develop always more in us. He will do this not only by securing his grace for us but also by arranging circumstances around us in such a way as to provide always more frequent occasions to grow in mutual love.

"May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race."

How then can we live this sentence?

Practically speaking, it's a matter of taking advantage of all the opportunities that are offered to us every day, if not every moment, to live this love. For example, have we ever asked ourselves why that particular colleague was placed next to us at the office or in our place of work, that particular student next to us at school, that particular person in our community or group we belong to? Why was that particular boss assigned to us? How did we wind up in a particular situation, or before some particular issue to deal with? If we will know how to look at all these circumstances in the light of our Christian vocation it won't take us long to find the answer.

Moreover, who knows how many times we have experienced the effects that mutual love produces in us. Every effort we make to go beyond ourselves and step out to encounter a neighbor, is a step forward in our growth as Christians. Every act of genuine love that we extend towards our neighbor profoundly transforms us, and makes us new. Our horizons widen, our soul stretches and is fortified; our longing for the life of grace and Jesus' truth is intensified.

Those who place the mutual love Jesus taught at the base of their existence and remain faithful to it are destined to reap abundant fruit in their lives. And isn't this what we Christians should be living for?

Chiara Lubich

At school I usually do well in my studies and I'm on the honor roll. When it was time for mid-terms I studied hard and did well on all the first exams, but in math I missed honors by one point. I was disappointed and I kept going over it in my mind because I knew it was important to do well.

At the same time, though, I realized that I was really oing to be a failure if I didn't live this experience according to the Gospel and that helped me put everything back into focus. I started right away to see the whole thing differently but it wasn't easy. Not only did I have to face what I felt was a failure but some of my classmates even seemed to be happy about it.

"In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me," came to my mind. No matter how humiliated I felt, I had to love my classmates and my teacher as well. I didn't take revenge against anyone. I just continued to love, to live this Gospel sentence.

A week later I found a note on my desk. It was from my math teacher. She reminded me not to worry about that mark and she hoped that it would in no way prevent me from being myself because she had noticed how I tried to love everyone. This was proof to me, the 'hundredfold', as

the Gospel says, because I experienced God's personal love for me. I understood that living his words *does* work and love conquers all.

M.K.

Recently I met the Gen of the Focolare Movement. They have helped me to realize that I, too, have to really love everyone, ready to give up my life for them because that's the measure of Jesus' love for us.

One evening I was doing laundry for my roommate and myself which is at least an all-evening event. Linda came in the front door with a friend of hers. It was around 11 p.m. She announced that she was going over to her friend's house to help *her* hang out diapers. Then she went into her bedroom to get something. I sat still on the couch before a mountain of freshly done wash—unfolded towels, sheets, etc., and thought: "Wait a minute! Where do you live anyway? Has it crossed your mind that *our* laundry is sitting here, waiting, too?"

Then it dawned on me that this was a chance to love Jesus in my friend. Her friend, meanwhile, invited me to come along with them. It was obvious what my response should be. When I thought that if the measure of my love had to be that of being ready to give my life then certainly hanging out diapers at 11 p.m. was far from that. With a change of heart I put aside my laundry and the fact that it would be there when we got home.

The next day I came home from work and found all my clothes folded on my bed, and all the rest of the laundry put away.

L.R.

A very 'special' gift for Christmas

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Roberto Cole

"In prayer we talk to God—heart to heart."
St. Frances de Sales

Why not the Circus?

The ring of the telephone broke the calm silence of the evening. It was Tony calling: a friend who lived in a town about one hundred miles away. "I just wanted to let you know that I gave your address and phone number to Giuseppe. He decided he wants to find a job in the city." Tony and I shared the same ideals in life. We always insisted that our neighbor was of great importance to us, that we wanted to put the needs of our neighbor before our own. I told him I would do whatever I could for his young friend.

"You see," Tony continued, "he's just been through a very painful ordeal. He needs to talk to someone and I thought of you. He'll probably show up at your house tomorrow morning around seven."

I put down the receiver a little perturbed. One thing was an ideal, another was a concrete circumstance in which to apply it. What about the picnic at the beach I had planned with my friends for tomorrow? I'm happy to sacrifice anything, but... "Couldn't Giuseppe come on Monday?" I thought. "Monday would be a much better day for me." Still slightly disgruntled I went to bed.

I was awakened at six by the insistent ringing of the doorbell. I couldn't believe it. Could it possibly be Giuseppe? I didn't even have a chance to get myself organized for the day. I got up and looked out. Yes, it was him.

I stopped a second before opening the door. I was certainly in the wrong frame of mind. I had to stick to my ideals and love, in a concrete manner and without fussing and fuming, even in this unexpected situation. I had to put aside every concern of my own and make room for the needs of this person.

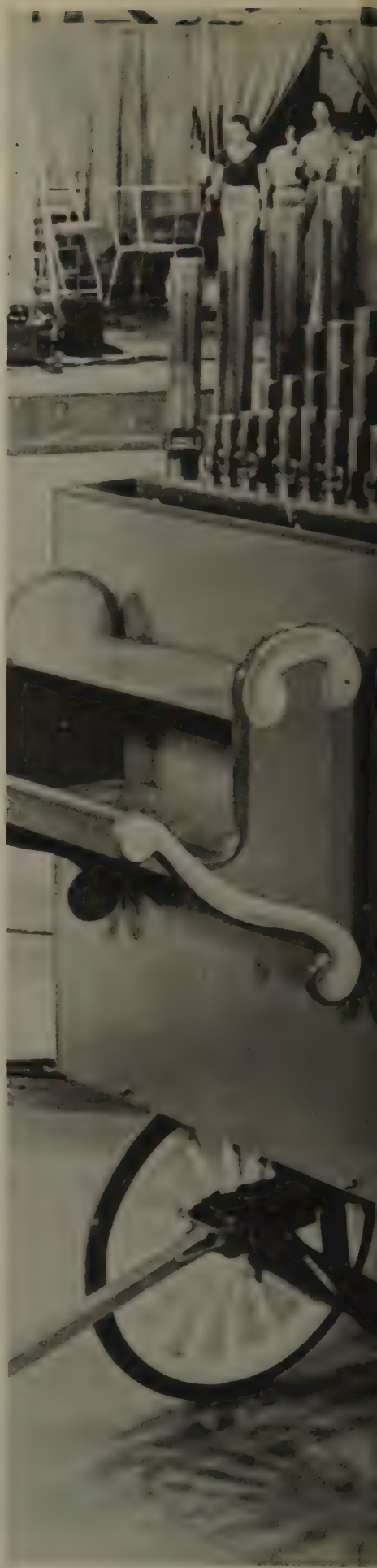
Giuseppe was serious and uneasy. I tried to take an interest in him. He had left home to find work. "It's the only thing," he said, "that can give meaning to my life. I brought along my own sheets. Could I just stay a few days while I look for work? I could never make it to pay a hotel."

I had a doubt in the back of my mind. Besides the fact that I couldn't compel the rest of my family to live my way, there actually were no extra beds in the house. What would I do? It was only a split second, then, the certainty—if I had faith even the size of a mustard seed....

We ate breakfast together and his shyness melted away into a cordiality I didn't imagine he possessed. I tried to give him all my attention, putting aside all thoughts of what I had "lost," the outdoors, the sun, the picnic.

"Let's take a walk," I suggested. It might help to get to know one another better. "I've spent most of my life in foster homes," Giuseppe confided as we walked along. "I never knew my parents and I always had to make my way as best I could. Now I've really decided to change my life and find a job, even the most menial one, as long as I can make a decent living.

Walking and talking we soon found ourselves at the fair-



Courtesy Catholic New York

grounds. A circus had been stationed there for a few days. I had an idea—why not ask for a job for Giuseppe. Giuseppe rather liked the idea; it would be interesting to be always on the move and meeting new people.

We asked to speak with the director. He seemed pleasant enough. He listened and said, "To tell you the truth, just a few hours ago two of my men had to leave to attend to family matters." Then, turning to me he added, "I would have work for you too if you want."

I thanked him explaining that I already had a job. Giuseppe was radiant. He shook my hand, his eyes welling up with gratitude. They wanted him to begin that afternoon. I promised him I would be back in the evening to see how things were going. He couldn't understand why I went so much out of my way for a perfect stranger.

At nine o'clock I was standing by the entrance to the Big Top. I spotted Giuseppe in a red suit and top hat. He was ushering spectators to their seats. He saw me and ran over smiling: "I've already made a lot of friends; the director even gave me permission to watch the show with you tonight."

It was the last day the circus would be in town. Tomorrow Giuseppe would be gone; who could tell when we would ever meet again. We shook hands warmly. "You know," he confided, "today for the first time, through what you've done for me, I felt God very close to me; I discovered him as love."

M.M. Bari, Italy

(Continued from page 13)
tainly cutting down his chances of committing another murder, but they were also closing the door on his chances of repenting and starting over. Did they have the right to deny him this opportunity?

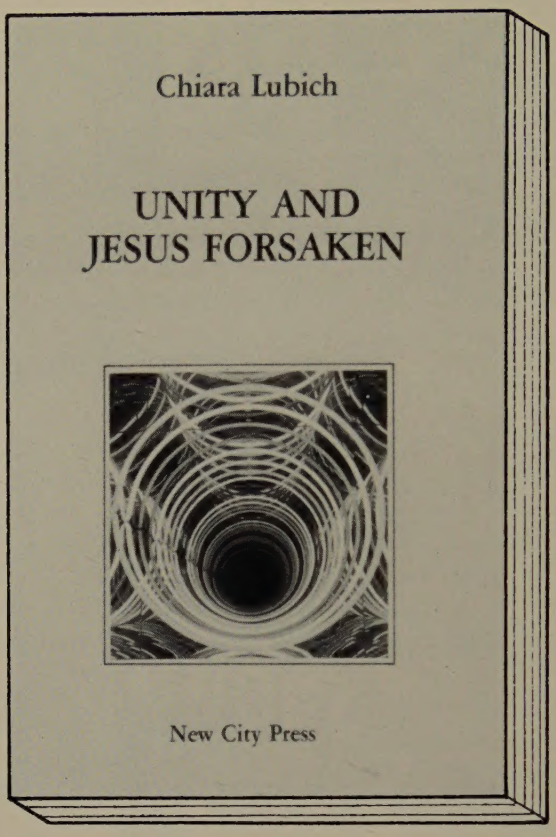
My appeal sensitized one of the most competent members of the team, and he decided to operate.

These and other circumstances led to the creation of an always deeper bond among all of us on the team. I noticed that the others valued my work and my judgment as well. At the same time, my way of living aroused their interest. "How do you manage to remain so calm, so capable of handling any situation," they would ask me. On such occasions, and without fear of being misunderstood, I spoke about the Christian values I was trying to live and that they had come to respect. More than once I heard them comment that the office had been "transformed."

By the end of the year I was able to successfully complete a number of operations by myself. I could count on the Chief Surgeon's support and he did all he could to keep me informed of his research.

Recently he was invited to attend a high-level international conference abroad where he would present his team and speak of their work which is considered to be at the forefront in surgery. One day, to my surprise, he called me into his office and asked me whether I, too, would attend the conference. "I am bringing my team," he said, "and you are as much a part of it as anyone and maybe more."

M.M. - Brazil



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What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

LOS ANGELES
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